

National Committee to
Preserve Social Security
and Medicare



October 31, 2001

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Honorable Sherrod Brown
Ranking Member
Health and Environment
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Brown:

On behalf of the millions of members and supporters of the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, we are delighted to know that progress is being made on legislation on Medicare contracting reform. We understand that efforts are underway to reconcile the legislation from both the Energy and Commerce Committee and the Ways and Means Committee. As you proceed with your efforts, we urge your support to retain a variety of beneficiaries protections contained in both bills.

In the Medicare Contracting and Reform Act (H.R. 2768), we support the efforts to provide Medicare beneficiaries with improved access to information by establishing an improved toll-free number for public access to information, the establishment of an internal beneficiary ombudsman, and a demonstration program to place a Medicare specialist in Social Security offices.

We strongly support the Energy and Commerce Committee bill's (Medicare RACER Act/HR 3046) protections that provide specific designation of Medicare-only Administrative Law Judges, expedited written responses to beneficiaries within 45 days to their written inquiries, and appointed individuals to handle Medicare complaints. We are especially interested in keeping the following two sections: the process for exceptions to national coverage determinations under special medical circumstances (Section 207) and the advance beneficiary notice that would detail the description of the item or service in advance and whether or not the item or service is covered (Section 208). Seniors often delay necessary treatment, services, or purchases of items that are recommended to them by their doctors, in fear of not being able to afford the portion that will not be paid for by Medicare. If they are given this information in advance, they can make an informed decision that will not harm their health status.

New choices in the Medicare program bring new complexities. Beneficiary education, which includes both access to accurate information and technical assistance to beneficiaries, is critical to the success of today's Medicare program in its mission to serve the health care needs of seniors and persons with disabilities.

We appreciate your efforts and leadership in this regard.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martha A. McSteen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Martha" being more prominent and the last name "McSteen" following in a similar style.

Martha A. McSteen
President